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## **MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Mayor and Council Members

**CC:** Spencer Cronk, City Manager

**FROM:** Jackie A. Sargent, General Manager *JAS*

**DATE:** February 12, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Austin Energy Winter Storm Operations Update

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With the cold and icy conditions affecting our area, this memo is to provide you with an update of Austin Energy's efforts to restore power across our service area. Austin Energy is closely monitoring our system and crews are working as quickly and safely as possible. Power outages caused by severe weather may require multiple repair crews. As of 3:00 p.m. Friday, Austin Energy has all available line crews and tree-trimming crews working in shifts around the clock across our service area. We strive to restore power to our customers as safely, quickly and efficiently as possible. This work is often quite hazardous.

The Austin-Travis County area is experiencing an extraordinary, ongoing storm system. The outages some Austin Energy customers are experiencing during this event are due to ice weighing down tree limbs and forcing these limbs to lean or fall on power lines. Ice can affect power lines and equipment in multiple ways and is more damaging than just snow or rain as it adds to the overall weight of a powerline or tree limb. Half an inch of ice can add as much as 500 pounds to a power line, causing the line to break and cause an outage. Ice also adds additional weight to tree limbs or leaves causing a breakage that can take out a power line as well.

Because many of the outages are vegetation-related, even when our crews restore power by clearing vegetation in one spot, nearby trees may subsequently fall and cause another outage in the same area. In addition, when equipment ices over, it may prevent it from operating properly leading to an outage.

Below are photos from last night showing just two instances of what is occurring. Austin Energy is also reminding the public of the hazards presented by downed power lines and to never touch anything in contact with a power line. The minimum safe distance from a downed power line is 35 feet.



*Left: Photo taken February 11, 2021 showing ice accumulating on Austin Energy power lines.*

*Right: Photo taken Feb. 11, 2021; downed power lines on Knollwood in Southwest Austin*

In addition, Austin Energy is currently reviewing issues some customers are experiencing with status notifications through Austin Energy's Outage Map and text messaging system. We are actively working through this. While the system is functioning properly, due to the nature of this event and restorations of multiple issues on the same circuit, customers may be getting multiple alerts. This does not mean we are unaware of a remaining outage. If customers have questions about their outage status, they can call 512-322-9100.

With all those conditions in mind, we are working hard to repair and prepare our system for the continued winter weather. Severe weather is expected to last through the weekend and into next week. The electric grid manager, ERCOT, is expecting record electric use as a result of the extreme cold temperatures across the system.

We place the highest priority on the safety of our crews and our customers. We appreciate our community's patience as we work to restore power for everyone.